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# Risk, Transgression and Substance Use: An Ethnography of Young British Tourists in Ibiza

Daniel Briggs\* & Tim Turner

## Abstract

British youth have a notorious reputation for binge drinking, drug use, sex and risk behaviours within most major European holiday resorts. Consequently, there is much concern about their social activities abroad - especially in the Spanish Balearics. While research has documented these behaviours among British youth on these islands, it has tended to rely on survey data and offered little understanding of why these behaviours might take place. This is the principle aim of our paper. Our research aims were to examine the drinking attitudes among British youth abroad and investigate the reasons that underpin these attitudes. Additional research interests were drug use, sex and risk behaviours. The paper is based on findings from ethnographic research with British youth in San Antonio, Ibiza. We spent one week with British youth and undertook participant observation and 17 focus groups (equating to 97 young people aged 17 to 31). The data suggests that British youth engage in these behaviours because they are exciting; to escape the constraints of work and family in the UK; and because these behaviours are integral to the construction of their life biographies and identities. The data also indicates that these behaviours are aggressively endorsed by various aspects of the social context of Ibiza.

**Keywords:** risk, transgression, substances, youth on holiday, ethnography.

## Introduction

*I try and guess who's on the Ibiza flight while I'm sitting at Birmingham airport. There's a group of three girls sitting opposite me in the departure lounge. They're all in their early 20s and clearly ready to party. The one on the left dips into her hand luggage and pulls out three spotty plastic cups and an unopened bottle of Malibu. They're all laughing and the one in the middle gets the camera out as a big gulp is taken directly from the full bottle. The one on the right stretches out a bangled arm and takes her spotty cup of Malibu. She's already dressed for the sun with long, tanned legs exposed by high-cut denim shorts. She takes a swig, looks at me and winces; 'Fuck! That's a strong one!' I smile back and ask if they're all Ibiza-bound. All three laugh and give me the nod. (Field notes Tim Turner 'Birmingham airport' 25.7.10)*

Later that day, Tim (Author and Interviewer) arrives at the hotel in San Antonio in Ibiza and wanders over to a local bar:

*I sit on a tall stool at the outside bar of the Irish pub. Cindy is fixing the drinks alone until midnight. She's a friendly 25 year-old from Leeds, with long hair dyed black and blonde. This is her third summer working in Ibiza (as bar staff, promo girl and as a rep for Thompson). She's previously worked in Majorca and Cyprus but says Ibiza is the craziest of the lot. We chat about the local area and she tells me that the real 'madness' is only a fifteen-minute walk away [in San Antonio]. She doesn't like the scene there at all:*

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*'I'm so embarrassed to be British sometimes...the lads are worse than the girls, they just drink as much as they can then end up fighting, it's like they're in a competition with each other'. We talk about the police and she says they're much stricter than back in the UK. Tourists are 'roughed up' for drunkenness. She says drugs are 'incredibly easy' to get and the police turn a blind eye. I take the barfly role for a good three hours, chatting to Cindy and sometimes the promo duo James and Kerry (both self-confessed pill-heads). A steady stream of good-humoured single sex groups rolls by, usually in fours and fives. A group of three young girls lurch up to the bar for cocktails and a shot. They're all about 18. The one immediately next to me is white blonde and has clearly had a few drinks already. She turns to me, asks if I'm on holiday, and laughs when I tell her what I'm doing. She fills in a questionnaire as her friends impatiently hurry her along: 'C'mon! We're wasting time!' Most punters go for €3 cocktails. Sex on the beach seems to be the drink of choice (easy to remember? Risqué double entendre?). Certainly no one bothers looking at the cocktail menu. The offer of a free shot of schnapps isn't refused in the three hours that I'm camped at the bar. Cindy, like all Ibiza bar crew, free-pours her drinks the European way; two bottles are held upside down in the glass simultaneously, for what seems like an eternity. These are big measures. She's armed with a string of shots around her neck, like some kind of bandit from a spaghetti western. Although a free shot only follows your first drink, Cindy sneakily hits me with a few extra freebies after each beer. It's midnight and the bar is starting to fill up. The free shots have hit me and I leave to get my head straight for tomorrow. (Field notes Tim Turner 'The bar' 25.7.10)*

This was Tim's experience after only a few hours of arriving in Ibiza. Indeed, Ibiza is a popular holiday destination choice for British youth (Govern de les Illes de Balears 2007). It is specifically marketed (Sellars 1998) because of its international reputation for nightlife (Bellis, Hughes, Bennett & Thomson 2003, IREFREA 2007), 'wild' party scene and easy access to illegal substances (Bellis *et al.* 2003, Hughes, Bellis & Chaudry 2004, Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich & Smeaton 1998, Segev, Paz & Potasman 2005, Smeaton, Josiam & Dietrich. 1998). Historically, the economy of Ibiza relies heavily on the commercial promotion of clubs and DJs (Garratt 1998), as well as the drug market (Armstrong 2004).

For British youth, Ibiza is, therefore, indelibly associated with dance music, alcohol, drug use and sex (Bellis *et al.* 2003, Calafat, Stocco, Mendes, Simon, van de Wijngaart, Sureda, Palmer, Maalste & Zavatti. 1998, Engineer, Phillips, Thompson & Nicholls 2003, Hughes *et al.* 2004, Hughes, Bellis, Whelan, Calafat, Juan & Blay 2009). However, previous UK research on youth behaviours in Ibiza has tended to rely on surveys (Bellis, Hale, Bennett, Chaudry & Kilfoyle. 2000, Bellis *et al.* 2003, Department of Health 2005, Hughes *et al.* 2004, Hughes *et al.* 2009). Such epidemiological studies tend to portray youth behaviours abroad as dangerous and the young people who engage in them as vulnerable. However, cultural studies researchers argue that these young people are 'active negotiators of the relationship between structure and agency' (Ettore & Miles 2002: 173).

To date, no ethnographic analysis explores reasons why British youth might engage in these behaviours while on holiday abroad. This issue is the primary aim of the article. While research shows that British youth do this to escape the constraints of work and family, which moderate everyday behaviours (Bellis, Hughes & Lowey 2002, Carter 1997, Carter, Horn, Hart, Dunbar, Scoular, & MacIntyre 1997, Ryan & Kinder 1996), others suggest the thrill of transgression and the seductions of risk are relevant reasons (Hayward 2002). We find in this research that these issues are important to consider but also suggest that British youth are intent on constructing meaning through 'memorable' holiday experiences. This conclusion is important to consider because of the fluidity of late modern identities (Bauman 2004, 2007); with young people increasingly expected to construct their own biographies (Helve & Bynner 2007) in uncertain times (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991); and doing so through the consumption of items such as alcohol, music and drugs (Furlong & Cartmel 1997, Miles 2000).

This study shows how the quest to construct these memorable 'experiences' among British youth interplays with the aggressive commercialisation and commodification of pleasure and youthful excess in Ibiza. This relationship is integral to youth biographies and identities and, therefore, important to consider for understanding why British youth engage in substance use and various sex and risk behaviours abroad. The aims of the research project were to examine the drinking attitudes among British youth abroad; investigate the reasons which underpin these attitudes; explore the role of bars, clubs, and tour operators in the promotion of alcohol. However, additional research interests were also linked to drug use, sex and risk behaviours. The research was carried out from June 2010 to July 2010.

## Methods

This short research study applied an ethnographic method (Hammersley 1992) and included three stages. The first stage involved gathering relevant material on the subject area. The second stage used six pilot focus groups with young people who were experienced on such holidays. The third and final stage used focus groups and observations in San Antonio, Ibiza. Observations were conducted in bars, clubs, beaches, and general touristic areas. These areas were public and activity was observed which would have happened without intervention or influence from researchers. The intention was not necessarily to '[live] the life to the extent that it is legally and ethically possible' (Inciardi 1995: 251) but rather to make astute observations of British youth and their behaviours. The study used a delicate combination of overt and covert roles (see Adler 1985, Agar 1986, Bourgois 1995). Low inference descriptors (field notes) recorded precise detailed descriptions of participants and their activities (Van Maanen 1988). Researchers' thoughts and impressions accompanied these notes, as well as summaries of conversations. This information was noted within a few hours of concluding observation sessions, and these data were entered directly into a password-secured laptop.

Seventeen focus groups were undertaken in Ibiza (n=97, aged between 17 and 31) over one week. The focus groups were open-ended, which enabled researchers to determine how British youth interpreted and talked about their behaviours (Carlson, Wang, Siegal, Falck & Guo. 1994). They were digitally recorded, with signed/verbal consent. Purposive and snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit groups into the study. Every group approached agreed to participate in the research. Data was collected throughout the night within pubs and clubs. Therefore, it was inevitable that some participants were intoxicated to varying degrees. According to Measham, Aldridge, and Parker. (2001), most clubbers within their sample were intoxicated by 1am, either with combinations of alcohol and/or drugs.

The issue of informed consent and intoxication is important to acknowledge when conducting in-situ research. There is concern, for example, that ecstasy users and people under the influence of alcohol may be overly compliant in agreeing to be interviewed (Measham *et al.* 2001: 76). Researchers took steps not to abuse such compliance. Where possible we took contact details of respondents and contacted them to reaffirm consent a few days after the interview. If any individual was very clearly intoxicated they were not asked to participate in this research project. This required a shared, subjective judgement by the researchers involved.

Informal conversations were also undertaken with local businesses, bar owners, taxi drivers and tourist representatives about their perceptions of British youth abroad. Informal conversations were mentally noted and written up into observation notes. All participants were given pseudonyms. Once transcribed, interview and observation data was categorised thematically, with the key areas of investigation providing the overall framework for coding (Ritchie & Spencer 2004). Analyses were inductive, which meant that themes emerged from the data rather than being hypothesised.

## Findings

Ibiza: The place to be

**Daniel** [Interviewer and author]: *Why come to Ibiza?*

**GG 1:** *For the 'experience'. Something a bit different.*

Many young people hear how 'amazing' Ibiza is through their peer networks. While some young people had never experienced Ibiza, some had already visited the island on four or five occasions. A few, in their early 30s, had visited Ibiza every summer for the last 12 years. A high proportion of young people appeared to have built up a bank of holiday experiences in nightlife resorts such as Zakynthos, Kos, Malia (all Greek islands), Aiya Napa (Cyprus) and Magaluf (Majorca). However, it was Ibiza that had most attracted them. Many expressed a desire to come and experience the clubs, bars, drugs and general atmosphere of Ibiza. They appeared willing to spend very large sums of money (€14,000 in one month between two young Brits) to capture that experience:

**Beachgirl 1:** *I don't care about money here. I don't think twice, I saved this money to put it on this [holiday].*

And:

**Tim** [Author and interviewer]: *What is the most you have spent here in a day?*

[Hugh puts head in hands]

**Hugh:** *£500 ... It's a joke, ain't it ... see we always say 'we're gonna be careful [with money] ... but it never happens.*

Many constructed the Ibiza experience as a relief from the tedium of daily work and family pressures in the UK. Typically, Neil said, 'You are working all year. In England, you haven't got sun, you haven't got beaches. It is different. You are away for two weeks. You think about nothing else but you on holiday. Go away, get hammered, get laid [have sex]. Life at home is constructed as mundane, and the holiday experience offers a chance for them to express themselves.

Ibiza: Lasting memories and fluid identity

Young people in the sample clearly saw the Ibiza experience as an opportunity to reconstruct identity. They embraced anonymity in order to 'be' someone different. On an island where they are unknown and where their behaviour is to a large extent unregulated (even by their friends because 'what happens in Ibiza, stays in Ibiza'), they frequently engage in behaviour that would not be undertaken at home in the UK. In a focus group of three male friends in Ibiza, this man in his mid-twenties said:

**Man 1:** *There is no restriction here, back home there is restriction. I have a family and work...everyone is on edge. The police, everyone! Here, no one looks at you twice. [Back home you] Got to think about work, bills, pressure, but here [in Ibiza] you don't think about shit, it is all about you, your friends and relaxing. You just enjoy it.*

Del Boy said 'anything goes in Ibiza' because 'you'll never see them again'. Indeed, when he and his friends were in Ibiza, they posed as professional footballers from a London football club. At first it was 'for a laugh', but they then realised their new identities could get them free drinks and access into VIP lounges. In Ibiza, British youth could change their identities and be whoever they wanted to be.

The holiday environment appears to offer new parameters for individual and group permissiveness because many young people sought to construct these memorable experiences with their friends through alcohol/drug/sex events:

*Our interest grows in the nearby bar where the music has been turned up, and a large number of young men are now dancing around all over the place half naked. As I enter, in front of me stand the large screens and a group of boys who are crowding round one young girl. They chant 'get your tits [breasts] out for the lads' as they surround her like a pack of wolves. She is laughing a little and exposes what she has much to their enjoyment. A few dives are made for her breasts before they are tucked away in her bikini top. This she does not enjoy so much and dishes out hand slaps. I sit down. The DJ starts a new track. There are heated screams of 'woo' and 'yeah'. The half naked ones jump up and down on each other and clap and laugh. There are further lurching noises from the group as they dare each other to dance erotically with each other. In general, the half naked youths continue to jump around on the pool table, scream at each other, high five and have sweaty hugs – that is until the number of women dwindle and they then retreat to another bar. I remain sitting and a couple come along and stand in front of me and kiss. His tiny frame can't quite reach around her large body as they seem engaged in one of those never-ending teenage kisses which seem to go on forever without breathing. When they peel away from each other, he takes himself off his tiptoes and wipes his mouth. They don't even seem that interested in each other. He then leaves with a friend. (Field notes Daniel Briggs 'Half naked and half asleep 28.7.10)*

In fact, it is because many of the sample travel in groups where these kind of behaviours are encouraged. In this conversation, these young Scottish men describe women as 'holes':

**Daniel:** *We were just talking about 'holes' and whether you were up for any.*

**Scot 1:** *[Sitting down and interrupting own sip of cocktail] Fucking right, fucking right.*

**Daniel:** *Right, so how many 'holes' have you had?*

**Scot 1:** *Two. Bad ones ... smelly ones ... stinking fucking ones ... came all over them. Hookers.*

**Scot 2:** *Whatever happens in Ibiza, stays in Ibiza!*

**Scot 1:** *[High fives Scot 2] Fucking right. Fuck the STDs.*

They explain how these activities are not attempted at home in order to protect their pride and reputation. On holiday, however, experiences can be played out on social networking websites such as Facebook and with their peers on their return. Social identity becomes fluidly captured by digital images from mobile phones and cameras and by live Facebook status updates. In another example, we spent 18 hours with some young men who had drunk around 12 pints of beer during the day, snorted cocaine, taken ketamine, and had planned to take three ecstasy pills over the course of the evening in a nightclub. Here we talk outside the nightclub about drug taking:

**Daniel:** *So how does this work, fella? Do you drop this shit now [the drugs] or do you go in [the nightclub] and drop it?*

**Paul:** *I done a couple [of pills], and I will do some when we get in a few hours.*

**Daniel:** *How many?*

**Paul:** *Well we got three tonight, start off with purple stars.*

**Daniel:** *Do they last a long time?*

**Paul:** *They last for hours.*

**Daniel:** *So why do another on top of it?*

**Paul:** *Because we are fucking sessionists.*

**Simon:** *We party hard mate, one would sort you out all night, mate, but we take free [three]. Then we'll go back to the local beach for some ket[amine].*

**Daniel:** But you have been drinking on top of this as well.

**Paul:** Yeah and we had coke and more ket earlier. I tell you what the ket is better at home than it is out here. It should paralyse you but when you are in the zone, it is immense, mate. No anger or violence.

**Paul:** What we do is coke [cocaine], 3-6 grams, however many pills you need for the night because depends on the DJ, the club, the music, then smash the ket on the beach.

**Daniel:** Don't you have to be careful with the ket?

**Paul:** Yeah, mate one key [dose] that's all because it can be dangerous.

**Daniel:** How dangerous?

**Paul:** Well I have been foaming at the mouth. Struggling. It is disgusting to take them drugs.

**Daniel:** So why do it?

**Paul:** Like we are not junkies BUT we do like to party. The pills last night were banging at DC10 [Ibiza nightclub]. It will be immense in Space [nightclub], looking forward to getting in there.

Yet still their 'experience' continues after the nightclub:

*And it didn't stop there because when they got back to the hotel at 7am they went to get the CD player and headed down to the beach to take Ketamine – purchased earlier from a mate who dealt drugs on the island. On the beach they were 'mashed'. As Simon took the Ketamine, there was a thud as he hit the floor. His mates grabbed his arm and dragged him in the sea while he was still semi-conscious – laughing while they did it...When we return later that morning, we find Simon decorated in nail clippings, sun tan lotion and cigarette ash. He also cut his own hair with scissors. When Simon woke up, he said, 'What happened to me, where is my leg?' because he could not move it because of the sleeping position he had been in – we suppose – or was it the after effects of the Ketamine? (Field notes Daniel Briggs 'Nightclubbing' 27.7.10 and 'The recovery' 28.7.10).*

Their Facebook pages show these images from this night and many comments on the 'crazy night it was'. Some young people appear to take an odd reassurance in their construction of the Ibiza 'experience' – despite the sinister and brutal consequences. A group of young girls in our sample said they had been molested by 'foreign men' and beaten by both nightclub bouncers and police. This happened only five hours prior to the interview. When the interview began, they were understandably angry about their victimisation, but after 40 minutes the anger desisted and their attitude changed. They had already started to think about their potential Facebook statuses:

**Sunglasses 1:** This morning we are all serious but now we are laughing about it in a way.

**Broad accent 1:** Icing on the cake. [Laughs]

**Tim** [Interviewer and author]: Have any of you put this on Facebook yet?

**All:** No, not yet.

**Sunglasses 1:** Not had time but we will after this [breakfast].

**Blue eyed 1:** In the car, on the way home from all this [the police station] I thought about it [Facebook status]. Mines going to be: 'Arrested and assaulted in Ibiza...very typical me'.

**Sunglasses 1:** Mine is going to be: 'Welcome to fucking Ibiza...already been molested and arrested'.

The highly traumatic event is magically transformed into a narrative of social identity within a few short hours of it happening; one which they can recount, reshape and relive for many years.

Ibiza: Designed for the 'experience'

**Girl 1:** I didn't want to get pissed [drunk]. So we just walked around [San Antonio] and did nothing, there was nothing else to do. So we ended up getting pissed for nothing. There are no places to go.



**Daniel:** *Is it designed for you to get pissed?*

**Girl 2:** *Yeah but I like that, fucking right I like that.*

The data also shows that these 'Ibiza experiences' embraced by British youth are heavily influenced and shaped by a social context that aggressively promotes alcohol, drugs and sex. So while young people actively engage in behaviours that they perceive as expected within the social context of Ibiza, so Ibiza endorses and facilitates these behaviours. These few minutes spent on the main drinking strip in San Antonio show how aggressively alcohol is marketed:

**Promo woman:** *... come in for some drinks.*

*[We move on. As I look down the strip, the streets are strewn with drink bottles, vomit, waste, half-eaten burgers, chips and all manner of rubbish. Suddenly]:*

**Lively promo man:** *Come in here to have a drink. Get two free shots as well, guys.*

**Daniel:** *[looking at the sign] €10?*

**Lively promo man:** *[Physically shepherding me in] What would you like to drink? ... Come down now, come on, come in.*

**Daniel:** *No.*

**Lively promo man:** *Try it now.*

**Daniel:** *Er, NO.*

**Lively promo man:** *[As if nothing has happened] Ok, guys enjoy your night.*

*[30 seconds later]*

**Chirpy promo man:** *Two drinks and a shot for €8...*

*(Daniel Briggs Field notes 'A walk on the strip' 29.7.10)*

Young people reflect on the wide availability of illicit drugs. While some career Ibiza goers (a few coming each summer for the last 12 years) said that there is now an increased regulation of the drug market, illegal substances nevertheless remain overtly available. Many young people receive drug offers on the streets, in alleyways, bars, cafes, clubs and hotels. If they were not drug aware before their trip to Ibiza, they certainly are by the end of their holiday:

**Tim:** *How many times a day do you receive offers for drugs?*

**Matt:** *About ten times a day.*

**Tim:** *Where does that normally take place?*

**Scott:** *On the street, anywhere. Pills, coke, weed.*

Many also took drugs and said that they know drug dealers in Ibiza. Others just deal directly with local dealers through hearsay. Yet even with the occasional police car search and talk of increased regulation of drugs, little seemed to impact on how young people use drugs to experience the atmosphere, the music, and clubs in Ibiza – for many know that the experience of music and drugs link inextricably:

*A sea of people moves before me, waving and dancing to techno music. It is easy to see who is on pills because those people are all drinking water. Some shield their eyes (their pupils) with sunglasses. Others just close their eyes. Everyone seems to be worshipping the DJ who is placed like a god at the centre of the club. We walk through, passing droves of people who don't acknowledge us – they focus on the music. Around the same sort of time, some resident dancers come out and dance next to the DJ – not on the same level as him – but nearby. They seem to know their routines. I remember a conversation with a former dancer who said that the club dancer's life is 'good money' but all you do is the same thing each night – a line of cocaine, 20 minutes of dancing, a line of cocaine, 20 minutes of dancing.*



*I walk into the toilets. There seem to be a lot of people hanging around outside. I go for a piss and to my right side are the cubicles. They are all locked and a giant sniff is heard behind one. The odd thing is there are no shadows under the toilet doors (which would indicate there are people there). I take my time and stick around for 10 minutes and no one emerges. They are taking drugs and this is confirmed when I start talking to the cleaning lady:*

*[Another sniff is heard as I dry my hands and I pull a face at the cleaning lady]*

**Cleaning lady:** *[In Spanish] They are taking drugs [she says nonchalantly] ... every night the same.*

**Daniel:** *How long do they stay in there?*

**Cleaning lady:** *Can be up to an hour and we have to call the security from time to time because some collapse in there.*

*As I walk around the room with difficulty, more young people pile into club and there seems to be no regulation on numbers. I come into even closer physical contact with people, but the truth is people here are just not bothered about that. Whereas these actions may cause some upset in the clubs back home [in the UK] when people are on some crazy drinking bender, there seems to be nothing but love in the club. When I do bump into someone, I receive a pat on the arm or the shoulder to signify acknowledgement of that bump. I am among friends here. (Daniel Briggs Field notes 'Nightclubbing' 27.7.10)*

With the promotion of clubs comes the promotion and availability of drugs. Clubs appear to tolerate drug use by large numbers of young people because of the profit margins reaped. The data also points to the aggressive promotion of sex:

*As we approach the main drinking strip in San Antonio, promo reps and prostitutes maul us, eager for business. The prostitutes jeer at us and we don't really know which way to turn... Eventually we settle in a bar. It is now about 3am. I leave for the toilet where I meet an African man singing away to himself – he 'earns money from tips' by keeping the toilets clean and offering fresh manly sprays to attract the 'punani' (Indian word for female sexual organs or slang meaning pussy):*

**African man:** *You well, man?*

**Daniel:** *[While urinating] Yes, thank you.*

**African man:** *You want some pussies? I love dem pussies.*

**Daniel:** *Er...Yes [Sounding confused]. I am here for the punani.*

*[This seems to trigger him and he starts to sing]*

**African man:** *Go punani, go punani. Punani, punani, go punani. Do do do, de de de. Wash yor finger for de minger [ugly girl]. Freshen up, up, up for de pu-na-ni. Thinking about the pu-na-ni, pu-na-ni, pu-na-ni, thinking about pu-na-ni, pu-na-ni. PU-NA-NI. [Some more young men enter the toilet] Freshen up, up, up for de punani [they laugh]. Wash yor finger for de minger.*

*[As I leave he says aggressively]*

**African man:** *What have you got for me, man?*

**Daniel:** *Nothing I'm afraid.*

*[An hour later, after we watch the waiter empty whole spirit bottles down the necks of a group of young British men]:*

**Tara:** *There is a girl walking around in her G-String [the stripper outside the gentleman's club], throwing herself at all the men, and they are not having it [tolerating it].*

**Suzanne:** *She is throwing herself at men but its just they are turning her down.*

*[We look over and the poor girl looks quite unstable and cannot stand straight. When she manages to stand, she rearranges her hair and pulls her G-String back over the area which it should be covering]*

**Tara:** *She is off her face [on drugs].*

**Kerri:** *You have to be to do a job like that.*

*We move on to another bar and drink a round. We all start dancing, but when Tara unexpectedly leaves, I go to look for her. In the confusion, I lose the rest of the group and am left wondering the streets, at the mercy of the prostitutes. It is now about 5am and I get completely harangued by them. The prostitutes seem*

*mostly to be African women, but it is difficult to say from which country. They tug my arms, asking if they can 'suck me off' – clearly this is the height of their business, as people seem more and more drunk. Perhaps also because there are people like me, who have lost their crowd and are wondering the streets alone. As I walk around trying to find everyone, strippers also approach me with sexual offers.* (Daniel Briggs Field notes 'A night on the town' 26.7.10)

Several young men in the sample said they had sex with prostitutes – all said they were drunk at the time. They play down the risks, instead suggesting it is something they do for the 'experience'. Local businesses, to some extent, tolerate these behaviours because the British bring immense capital to the island. Many British youth spend hundreds of pounds every night in clubs, taxis, drugs, drink, and food. Therefore, the clubs, the bars, the taxi drivers – the economy – need this income and, therefore, happily stomach the behaviours the British bring because it is good business:

**Daniel:** *How do you cope with us British?*

**Bar owner:** *Some ones are like animals, but some are like you, like gentlemen. We live with British people here, without British, this island goes down.*

**Daniel:** *So you need us. You have no choice. But there are Italians, Spanish, Germans here. What's different from the British?*

**Bar owner:** *Well, all the Spanish don't like going where the British are, they hate it. I love British people [puts his hands on my hands].*

**Daniel:** *So what do you do with people who misbehave in your bar?*

**Bar owner:** *I work with them, talk to them, make them happy, sell them drinks, we sell a lot.*

**Daniel:** *But the Spanish don't really come here [to your bar].*

**Bar owner:** *I live here in Spain, but really I live in Britain with British, here look around.*

**Daniel:** *So how do you make them comfortable?*

**Bar owner:** *I say 'Hello, how are you?' Make them good quality drink because in Britain they are miserable, but here they are very happy. I love people from UK.*

## Discussion

In view of its international reputation for nightlife and substances (Bellis *et al.* 2003, Hughes *et al.* 2004, IREFREA 2007, Josiam *et al.* 1998, Segev *et al.* 2005, Smeaton *et al.* 1998), this study has attempted to provide insight into the social context of Ibiza as a nightlife tourist location for hedonistic British youth engaged in high levels of alcohol use, drug use, risk and sex behaviours. The study applied ethnographic methods because previous research made use of survey procedures (Bellis *et al.* 2000, Hughes *et al.* 2004, Department of Health 2005, Hughes *et al.* 2009) and did not give enough attention to issues of agency and context. As researchers, in taking part to some extent in these activities, researchers are part of the social interactions (Inciardi 1995), but the researchers of the present study tried not to influence the direction of the data, and instead attempted to document and understand the behaviour of British youth, and how the social context shaped their behaviour of the 'Ibiza experience'. In doing so, the study provides insight into this particular culture (Van Maanen 1988).

The data show that British youth construct identity through touristic experiences of high levels of alcohol consumption and drug use, and engage in risk and sex behaviours (Bellis *et al.* 2003, Engineer *et al.* 2003, Hughes *et al.* 2009). These alcohol/drug/sex events appear to act as a brief hiatus from the banality of work and family constraints in the UK (Bellis *et al.* 2002, Carter, 1997, Carter *et al.* 1997, Ryan & Kinder 1996), as young people embrace the seduction of youthful risk taking (Hayward 2002). In Ibiza, they seem to free to be whoever they want to be (Bauman 2004, 2007) and do whatever they

want to do; an ethos eulogised by Primal Scream's *Loaded*, the classic house music single from the late 1980s. It is our contention that Ibiza, therefore, represents a temporary 'wild zone', where young people are free of the usual parameters that constrain hedonistic excess. There is no 'weekend' and, therefore, no need to worry about work on a Monday morning. There is no reaction of disapproving parents (or partners) to be concerned about. Financial restraints also appeared to be absent for many of the young people we met. That is why many young British tourists in Ibiza seem to actively embrace the experience as a two-week liberation from 'real life' in the UK (Blackman 1995), a temporary loss of control that differs from the 'controlled-loss of control' identified by scholars in the UK (Hayward 2002, Measham 2004). However, this comes at a cost – young peoples' attitudes to spending are haphazard, yet they show no regrets because work and home lives are mundane (Blackman 1995) and include characteristics of high uncertainty in the late modern context (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991). This was also evident in our own personal reflections when returning from Ibiza:

*By now, I am so tired, so unaware of things, I feel like someone could rob me now, and I would not notice or feel anything. By the time I get to the train, I am feeling completely dazed and disorientated. I don't know what time or day it is and I have not even gone 'at it' over the week. I just look out of the window and try to think, but my thoughts just keep collapsing. I feel like I have been to another planet and come back wondering which was real. When I get off the train at London Bridge to change, I feel abnormal. I don't quite know how to interact with people. Once again, I am around routine, the 'everyday' worker, the commuter mumblings and life as we know it in this country. After all, it is boring. Maybe I can start to see that if people had very mundane work or were doing something with little direction, then a trip to another planet could well be the answer. It could well be what you would plan all year for, hype up with your friends, what you would save for each month. It could well give you an experience of a lifetime, something to talk about to pass time in the mundane everyday world. When I get home, I want to sleep but can't. My urine is still a florescent yellow despite my over consumption of water over the last five days. When I close my eyes, the music and the sunset enters my head from Café Mambo. No matter how much I wanted to leave, it is still in my thoughts. Ibiza is imprinted. (Field notes Daniel Briggs 'Dazed and disorientated' 30.7.10)*

Instead, British youth on holiday invest great importance in the experience (Griffin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, Mistral & Szmigin 2009) irrespective of the cost (financially, practically, physically and mentally). This expression is because, regardless of the consequences, these experiences appear to help British youth construct life biographies (Helve & Bynner 2007) which, in turn, can be useful for future social discourse (on Facebook, with friends at social events, and until it is time for the next holiday). These experiences are, therefore, integral to identity construction and are heavily shaped by the social context – in particular, by the aggressive marketing of alcohol, drugs and sex (Sellars 1998). This also appears to highlight how the identities of British youth interplay with the consumption of items such as music and drugs (Furlong & Cartmel 1997, Miles 2000). While some consider these behaviours dangerous and risky (Bellis *et al.* 2002, Bellis *et al.* 2003, Hughes *et al.* 2004, Hughes *et al.* 2009), in contrast, the data appears to highlight that these behaviours are expressive and show how British youth negotiate agency within this particular context (Ettore and Miles 2002). While young people engaged in behaviour which they perceive as 'expected and typical' within the social context of Ibiza, they also recognised that the social milieu actively endorses and condones these behaviours. In fact, the data seems to suggest that Ibiza relies on the social activities of British youth to support its economy (Armstrong 2004, Garrett 1998) in a time when British tourist numbers are in decline (IREFREA 2007).

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